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1st Rhode Island Regiment Roll Book, 1781-1783

To address the shortage of available men to serve in Rhode Island regiments during the American Revolution, the General Assembly passed an act allowing “every able bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave” to enlist. The act stipulated that enslaved men who enlisted and passed muster would be granted their freedom after their service.

This is one page from the regiment’s roll book. There is a row for each soldier, listing where they were born, their occupation, their hair color, skin color, and more. As you will see, the regiment included men of both African, Indigenous, and mixed heritage. Men of mixed ancestry are referred to as “mulatto” or “mustee.” The abbreviation D^o means “ditto” or “as above,” which means that the description is the same as the one above.

The roll book is important because in most cases we have very few written records of these men. The book also has information about the regiment’s supplies, honors earned, casualties, and other regimental information.

If you want to learn more, you can see the entire 1st Regiment Roll Book [here](#).

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, Revolutionary War Record Book, First Rhode Island Regiment, 1781-1783, C#0505.

